

Commencement Address  
The Citadel  
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### America's Changing Role

Members of the graduating class of 1980, your president, Admiral Stockdale, and I were born within a few days of each other. We were raised within a few miles of each other. We were raised in the Middle West of the United States in the 1930's, a period when isolationism was particularly strong in that area. As we prepared to go to college, neither of us ever thought that a large part of our lives would be spent in support of the foreign policy of this country. I suspect neither of us ever thought that we would travel as far away as Europe. Yet, by the time we reached our graduation in 1946 -- just as you have today -- isolationism was virtually extinct. It went out in the great crucible of World War II.

By the end of that war, a profound change had taken place in this country, a country that just two and one-half decades before had rejected membership in the predecessor to the United Nations, the League of Nations. In contrast, in the immediate post-World War II years, under the great leadership of President Truman, this country evolved the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and the UN Resolution on Korea. In those years we firmly committed this country to help our friends and allies defend themselves against aggression. Suddenly our nation's interests were worldwide and the mantle of free world leadership was America's. That changed the lives of Admiral Stockdale and myself markedly.

As you graduate today, the United States faces changes in its relationship to the rest of the world that are just as profound and, I would suggest, they may affect your future markedly, also. The world environment in which the United States must operate in the 1980's will be as different from the world of the 1960's and 70's as was the world of the 1940's that Admiral Stockdale and I knew to the world in which we were raised in the 1930's.

A big difference for you, however, is that it is very likely that this country will have to adapt to that change without some cataclysmic event like a world war to alert us. You will have to define the new role of United States leadership in a world where conditions are evolutionary and subtle--circumstance which you may not detect if you are not alert.

Take, for instance, the traditional role of the United States as leader of the Western Alliance. For thirty-five years, we have clearly been the dominant force within the Alliance. Can we, however, expect to remain dominant in the 1980's? Will we still be the largest and by far the most powerful member of that team? You would do well to expect surprises from our allies.

The Europeans and the Japanese are prosperous economically. They are stable politically. They feel independent and deserve to. They still acknowledge, of course, that their security is inexorably tied to their relationship with us, but the scramble today for oil and other natural resources has become so vital to them that they must have their own say in how the Western World copes with these problems. The Alliance is not doomed to weaken, but it is bound to function with far more regard for the independent voices of its members. There will be a different Alliance in the decades ahead.

If our ties with our allies alter, so too will our relations with our principal adversary, the Soviet Union. I believe you will have to adjust to a different Soviet Union in the 1980's. From Stalin, through Khrushchev, to Brezhnev, Soviet leadership has been cautious and conservative in avoiding possible military confrontations with the United States. In the 1980's, however, we will confront the first Soviet leadership that does not feel inferior to the United States militarily.

Last December in Afghanistan the Soviet leaders committed their military forces to combat outside the Soviet Bloc for the first time since World War II. Does this indicate a new aggressiveness, a new willingness to take risks? It seems to me that it does indicate at least that they are likely to continue to take advantage of opportunities when they occur.

What about the deteriorating economic fortunes of the Soviet Union? Will the Soviet leaders of the 1980's feel pressure to undertake military adventures to cover up their economic deficiencies at home? For example, will they use their military in efforts to augment their diminishing oil production, or will their economic weakness keep them at home tending the store?

Much depends, of course, on who those Soviet leaders of the 1980's will be. Surely the aged men who govern the Soviet Union today will be gone. We can only predict that whoever succeeds them is unlikely to be as cautious or as predictable in dealing with the United States. You had better be prepared for more surprises from Moscow in the future than in the past.

One additional element of change that you are bound to encounter in the 1980's will be the scramble for natural resources. The most obvious example is oil. But how about the other imports which we take for granted? We import all of our rubber; all of our coffee, chromium, cobalt, tin, and most of our manganese and nickel. In all of these and other cases, nations that used to be pliant to our needs for such resources are independently determining what it is best for them to produce, not what is best for us. They will produce only that which generates the amount of revenue which they need, or which lets them conserve their resources in accordance with their own dictates.

When you couple more restrictive production policies with an increasing world population and the rising expectations of that population for a better standard of living, you can see that a great transference of power to nations that have never exercised it before is taking place.

In the decades of the 80's and the 90's, you will have to understand those nations, their national aspirations, and the character of their people. You will have to negotiate with them far differently than we have even in the recent past.

It is my deepest hope that you will not have a World War to startle you into appreciating how different the role of the United States will be in the world of the 1980's than it was in the 1970's. Admiral Stockdale and I did not have to be as perceptive as you will have to be. We had a world war which jolted this country into a new awareness of its changed role in the world. If you are to make sound decisions in the 1980's and the 1990's, you must care about the world around us and you must pay attention to it. That applies whether you enter the military, or other government service, or whether you pursue a civilian life. You must understand how our national interests as well as those of our allies and potential enemies relate -- where those interests harmonize and where they conflict. And, understanding that, you must help to define our nation's role in the world.

This is not an easy challenge, especially since the pressures on you for conformity of outlook will be greater than perhaps any time in this century. Do not forget that George Orwell's decade is here. The class that replaces you in The Citadel next fall will be the Class of 1984. George Orwell's "doublethink" is already with us in some measure. Today you, as individuals, must stand up to the omnipresent, supremely superficial, instant analyses of our times by the television networks and the written media. Only you can determine if "Big Brother" will direct your thinking. Only you can determine whether your understanding of our nation's role in the world will be dictated by the tube or molded by your own independent thinking.

That is really why you have been here at The Citadel -- to develop your creative abilities and to learn to think independently --not to learn the skills of any particular profession, military or civilian.

I challenge you to reason soundly and deeply about the world of the 1980's, and our nation's role in it because that role will continue to be critical to all free men. We can retain the mantle of world leadership or we can lose it. The reins of United States leadership will be in your hands much sooner than you think.

I congratulate you on the achievement of this great step in your careers. I also challenge you, as your careers move onward, to ensure that, whether as a public servant or a private citizen, you each seek to repay the privilege of this fine education. You can repay it by contributing to our nation's understanding of itself and its responsibilities in the complex world which we will face in the decades of your leadership. Good luck and God bless you.